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**THE TRADE UNIONS,  
THE PARTY AND THE STATE**

**PUBLISHED BY THE COMMISSION FOR FO-  
REIGN RELATIONS OF THE CENTRAL  
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# THE TRADE UNIONS, THE PARTY AND THE STATE

Extracts from speeches by Comrade Tomskey at a meeting of the III Session of the Profintern on June 29, 1923, and at the joint meetings of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions and the Moscow Provincial Council of Trade Unions with foreign worker delegations, on August 11 and November 7, 1926.

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## **The Trade Unions, the Party and the State**

The question of the relationship existing between the trade unions, the State and the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R. is of great interest to Western European workers and to many of the leaders of the trade union movement in Western Europe. A great deal of confusion and misunderstanding prevails in connection with this matter. The many questions which have been put to me in private conversation by rather responsible representatives of the Western European trade union movement have astounded me by their naivete and have made me wonder how such highly cultured persons, who have had years of practical experience in the trade union movement, can be so entirely at a loss in such matters.

### **1. The Trade Unions and the Party**

The relationship that exists between the Soviet trade unions and the workers' political party in our country — the Communist Party — is the result of the peculiar historical development of the Russian trade union movement. This peculiarity consists mainly in the fact that the establishment of the workers' political party in Russia preceded that of the trade unions.

Our trade unions grew up at a time when a proletarian party, a small one, it is true but having distinct ideas and a definite Socialist programme, had already



The revolution was waning. The Tsarist government, shooting and hanging countless number of workers, destroyed the political organisations of the proletariat, the party and the soviets, and following on the destruction of our party and the soviets, the Tsarist government smashed up our trade unions. Thus the Russian workers learned only too well, that politics are inseparable from economics and had it palpably demonstrated that the trade unions cannot live and develop outside the political movement.

I do not think it is my task to prove that the division drawn between the workers' economic struggle and their political struggle is purely artificial. Whoever doubts this should reflect a little on the experience of the British coal strike, and then to say honestly whether this was an economic or political struggle. The British strike was a class struggle and the class struggle, as Marx taught us, is a combination of the political and the economic struggle; politics is nothing more than a concentrated expression of economics.

The 1917 revolution (February) marks the period of the rebirth of our trade unions (destroyed in the reaction of 1907—9). True, after 1909, there was a certain revival in the trade union movement in the period between 1911 and 1914, but it was in fits and starts and could not in any way be compared with the 1905—1917 movement. From the very outbreak of the revolution, the trade unions spontaneously arose reborn in all their might, and, as in 1905 their initiator in most cases was the Party. But now a new factor in the founding of the union appeared — the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, acting as their Departments of Labour. The trade unions together with the working class, organised around the Soviets, and

actively and energetically took part in the political life of the country. The working class carried on the struggle with the bourgeoisie. Could the trade unions, at this point, stand on one side, seclude themselves in their trade union shell? No, that too, was impossible. They took part in the struggle together with the working class, reflecting and expressing not only the economic, but the political moods and demands of the working class. Actually we can see how the Mensheviks lose influence almost simultaneously in the Workers' Soviets and the trade unions, for the very reason that these organisations were an expression of two forms of the united class movement of the proletariat. More than this, the trade unions, being the organisations nearest and most closely connected with the working masses in their daily struggles, began somewhat earlier to express the political changes in the working class, by moving over to the side of the Bolsheviks and advancing along the road to active struggle for Soviet power.

Formally, the relationship between our trade unions and the Communist Party in no way differs from the relationship between the trade unions and parties in any Western European country. Formally, we are less closely connected with the Communist Party than, for example, the British trade unions with the Labour Party, to which they are wholly affiliated and which they finance. Actually our trade unions are guided by the Communist Party, and the majority of the leaders of the trade union movement are members of the Party. This is due to the fact that our workers, having learned in the experience of three revolutions that politics are inseparable from economics, are now accustomed to elect their leaders both in the trade union movement and



in the Soviets, and to demand from them a clearly defined political policy. Our workers say — we know the programme and tactics of the Communist Party; we know that the Party will support those Communists who are recommended by it to the workers, and are elected by the workers to responsible posts, and we know that the Party will guide them; consequently we elect the Communists. That is why the majority of the leaders of our trade unions are Communists. However, in the smaller local organisations more than half of the members are not Communists. But what happens to these non-Communists? As they become more closely acquainted with our work, they get tired of being non-Communists and they join the Party. Is it possible for a formal, official relationship to exist between the Party as a whole and those of its members who lead the trade union movement and the Party? Such a position is inconceivable. Yet, despite the fact that no formal relationship or obligations exist our trade unions, nevertheless, accept Party leadership. True, ineptitudes and inaccuracies occur in this leadership. But we,—the Party and the trade union, are not afraid to bring these defects up for public discussion at Party Congresses and Conferences. and we make no secret of them. This huge influence which the Communist Party exercises over our trade unions seems strange and abnormal to many leaders of the Western European unions. This influence, indeed, is very strong; we do not deny it. But it is not limited to influence on the trade unions; it is extended to the entire working class and more than that to the whole population. But does not the Party, in its turn, become subject to the influence of the trade unions? Ten of the members of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Council of the Trade Unions

are members also of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; and simultaneously with their trade union functions — their principal occupation — they carry out even more important Party functions in the leading organs and the daily work of the Party. There is not a single Provincial Committee of the Party, which does not contain several members of the Presidium of the local provincial council of trade unions, the chairmen of the more important union branches, and so on.

Such, in practice, is the existing relationship between our Communist Party and our trade unions. I consider that such a relationship is one of the best of our peculiarities. This relationship may explain much that is enigmatical and obscure in the history of our working class movement. It is the existence of these two combined forces — the Trade Unions and the Party — working unceasingly together, that explains the «miracle» of our Revolution. If for a moment we could imagine that to-morrow all the trade unions of Germany will march hand in hand with the German Communist Party, we would have no doubt that a Soviet Government would be established there within five minutes after that combination of forces took place; and a very good Soviet Government it would be, much more powerful and much more organised than the Russian Soviet Government, for the German people are much more cultured than we. If we could imagine for a moment a combination of the trade unions with the Communist Party in England, then in England also a Soviet Government would rapidly spring up. That is what the unity that exists in Russia between the Communist Party and the trade unions has given to the working class movement.



The trade unions of the U.S.S.R. were created by the Party. Led by the Bolshevik Party (now the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), they have learned to resist the attack of the counter-revolution by proletarian armed forces.

During this heroic struggle, the working class of the U.S.S.R., together with the trade unions, verified and understood the truth of the theoretical position of the priority of the political movement, and the necessity for leadership by the proletarian party — the Communist Party — in every form of struggle of the working class; the leadership of all proletarian organisations.

Under the Party's leadership, they have gained power; under its leadership they have built up their New Workers' State — the Soviet Republic.

Led by the Party, and together with it, they have thwarted the attacks of the interventionists and the attempts of the counter-revolutionaries; they have dragged the country out of the horrors of starvation, war, economic ruin and epidemics; they have developed the productive forces of the country, and raised its cultural level; they have strengthened and broadened the foundations of Socialism.

That is why we have quite a different relationship with our Communist Party from that existing in other countries; that is why the trade unions and all the workers of the Soviet Union look upon the Communist Party as their guide, as their leader. The right to this position has been won by the workers' party of the U.S.S.R. — the Communist Party — in the heat of the class struggle, and has been tested and proved during the nine strenuous but glorious years of leadership of the class in power.

Our trade unions are not affiliated to the Party. Formally they are non-party. They unite all workers, irrespective of religious and political convictions; but, with faith in their Party, the workers elect Communists to all the responsible posts in the trade unions. On all the most important issues, the trade unions are guided by the Party, with which the glorious history of nine years of victorious revolution has everlastingly linked them.

## II. The Trade Unions and the State

What is the relationship between the working class, organised in trade unions, and the State during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, when the working class holds the reins of power? Are conflicts possible between the working class organised industrially in the trade unions, and the working class organised politically, in a new, hitherto unheard of political organisation — the Soviets, the Soviet State?

When the Russian workers took to arms, when, led by the Communist Party, they overthrew the bourgeois government, the only organs on which the new government could rely were the trade unions — for the old State apparatus, the old civil servants, with all their prejudices and caste ideas, refused to work with the new proletarian government. The Communist Party took power, and all the trade unions assisted it. The trade unions during the struggle mobilised the Red Guard. The trade unions during the struggle for power, were in all the revolutionary organs. The apparatus of the trade unions was put entirely at the disposal of the common cause, which aimed at the seizure of power.

We consider that the Government of the working class, the dictatorship of the proletariat, is the govern-



ment of our class. For this reason in the Soviet Union the question of the State and of the relationship of the working class to the State is on an entirely different plane from that in other countries.

What is the State and State Power? State Power in the hands of whatever class it may be concentrated, is an organ of class coercion, an organ of class violence. When that power is in the hands of the bourgeoisie, then for us, and for all Russian workers the question of the relationship to such a State is quite clear. In so far as the State apparatus is an apparatus of class violence employed by the bourgeoisie, we must fight it in order to overthrow it and take power in our own hands. The State, at the head of which stands a class inimical to us, and which we are fighting, is an alien, inimical State. The exploiting class, holding power directly or through its servants and lackeys, is interested in maintaining this State, whereas we are interested in overthrowing it and breaking up its apparatus, as an instrument of class coercion and violence. But when our class holds power, then the question of the relationship to the State is quite a different one. Then we take the apparatus of class violence in our hands and use it to break the resistance of our class enemies, when the whole State machine is in the hands of the working class, then, naturally, the relationship of the proletariat to the State is changed. Can there be a conflict of interests between the workers organised in the industrial organisations — the trade unions, and the State created by the workers, built up by the workers and then developed by the workers? A moment's reflection will suffice to convince one that such conflicts cannot exist, because a conflict of interests between the trade unions and the Soviet State would signify that either the trade unions are

not proletarian class unions, or that the State is no longer, or has not yet become, a workers' State — defending the interests of the class in the name of which it governs. That is how we understand the question of the relationship of the trade unions to the Soviet State.

The quintessence of the controversy between ourselves and our opponents — the Russian reformist Mensheviks — was that the Mensheviks, in advocating «independence» (of the trade unions), drew a line of demarcation between the two sides of the working class movement — the political side and the economic. Under the cloak of the demand for «independence», they introduced the idea that the trade unions, no matter what the circumstances, must have a different policy from that of the organ of the Dictatorship of the proletariat, the Soviet State. This all evolved from the two different conceptions we both had of the nature of the State in general, and of our Soviet State in particular. Confused in the conception of the State in general as a non-class organisation, or an organisation above classes — a theory directly leading to social-chauvinism and the defence of the bourgeoisie — they considered, in particular, that our State was a petty-bourgeois State, a petty-bourgeois republic: «All this shouting about Communism means nothing» they said, «a year or two will pass and everything will go on as before, as under Kerensky». Our point of view is, however, that our Republic is the new form of State, foreseen by Karl Marx and Lenin; that is the Dictatorship of the Proletariat; and we do not intend to go back to the past. If the State represents our class, then, of course, there can be no political contradictions in the general trend of policy of the two forms of organisation of one and the same working class.



Think of what would happen to the Soviet State, to the dictatorship of the proletariat, if to-morrow, on some very important question of internal or foreign policy, the Council of People's Commissaries, or the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Government were to carry out one policy, and our trade unions another, entirely opposite, policy. This would mean a class split, the collapse of the State, a new struggle for power; we should then have to begin to talk in the language of machine-guns, the controversy would have to be settled by arms.

It may be said: this is all right as far as it goes; this is correct from the class, theoretical point of view; but let us examine the question from the practical point of view. We are confronted with the position that the working class is not homogeneous, but consists of millions of individuals; within the working class there are various strata and groups, which have varying interests and these may come into conflict. Can not the interests of one factory conflict with the interests of another? Moreover, in the Workers' State, every worker naturally wants to get more. Does not this give rise to contradictions? To this we answer that there are, and can be, no class contradictions; and that separate, individual conflicts certainly have been, and do still arise. But what is the social character of these conflicts? Suppose separate groups of workers, sometimes erring and failing to understand the common interests of their class, may conflict with other groups, or with the working class as a whole: in such cases, the working class corrects them (for the strength of the working class lies in its solidarity, based on strict proletarian discipline — the subjection of the minority to the majority). Or suppose the proletarian State has not yet managed to remove the defects in the State

apparatus. It still retains some of the survivals of the old bureaucracy, of the old machinery, which we have not yet managed to adapt to the new cause. There are still many defects that have to be remedied, and this, will require a great effort, bearing in mind our lack of culture. In short, we will suppose that individual conflicts come about as a result of these defects in the State apparatus itself, which must be remedied.

In this case it is the duty of the trade unions to get these defects remedied through the medium of the organs of the State. Do unpleasant conflicts occur between individual factory managers and the workers? Yes, but why? Because some factory managers are over-zealous; they have become, as we say: «detached from the masses», they fail to understand the complexities of some question or other and, as a result, conflicts occur. How do we settle these conflicts? We remove the person from his post as factory manager, send him to work at the bench, and put a trade unionist or another more prominent worker in his place. Is it to our interest to allow these conflicts, when they take place, to assume an acute form, the form of a strike? No. Since the working class owns the industries it is interested in seeing to it that not a single unit of productive energy is wasted for a single minute. Every conflict hinders the work, and the success of our common work depends on our ability to work in unison, on the efficiency of the economic structure. The organs of the State in our country are created by us — the trade unions and the millions of workers united in them — and we can readjust them and rebuild them as we wish, in the interests of our cause. We do this jointly with the Communist Party, jointly with the Soviets. The trade unions, as the expression of the class mood



the causes and how the conflicts came about. We conceal this from no one.

Are our trade unions dependent on, or independent of, the State? If this is understood in the formal interpretation which Western European trade unions usually give to the question, then, of course, we are independent, for the trade unions are managed by their own democratically elected organs, have their own funds, and are in no way subject to the State. In the wider meaning of the word, in the sense of class politics — the unions are dependent, as organs of a united class; for the State is our State. But, this dependence is based on mutual dependence, for equally the Council of People's Commissaries and the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Government is dependent upon the trade unions. How can they be independent of us, when we have 4 representatives in the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Government and 60 representatives in the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets itself; when we have a consultative vote in the Council of People's Commissaries on every question that arises therein; when the Council of People's Commissaries cannot decide a single question concerning the life of the workers, without our final decision in the matter; when we have the right to remove from the agenda of any high State organ any question whatever, by a mere telephone call saying: Just a moment. You want to discuss such and such a matter, but you have not asked us our opinion. We have something to say on the matter. Be good enough to postpone that item. And we know of no case when this has been refused us. The trade unions have the right to call upon any of the People's Commissaries to appear before them to make a report, and no one of

them has the right to refuse on the grounds that he is not formally responsible to the unions in question. Such a relationship between the trade unions and the State in the workers' State is the correct one. In the bourgeois State such a relationship would be incorrect, since there the State works against the working class and there the relationship of the working class to its State should be the relationship of foe to foe. But our State is our own. If this State becomes bankrupt or breaks down, the working class will fall with it. That is what is called a mutual relationship, mutual dependence between the trade unions and the State. Certainly, we must all accept responsibility; for we all fought together for power, and we gained power together. The trade unions, as representatives of the workers, cannot refuse to accept these rights.

And now we come to the question of material dependence. It may be asked: Perhaps you are maintained financially by the State? To be frank, we should not, in case of need, consider it a disgrace to exist at the expense of the Proletarian State! After all, it is our money, the money of our Workers' State! On the contrary, it would not be pleasant, to live on the money of a bourgeois State! Yet we know that some of the Western European trade unions receive subsidies from the bourgeois States.

During the period of War Communism, we went through a stage of inflation, falling currency, and we could not collect our trade union dues regularly. We were then counting in tens of millions, while the Germans counted in billions — at that time we took money from the State. The State subsidised us. Now that we have a stable currency, we take no subsidies from the State, except that



which is provided for by the Constitution and the law and which follows logically from the very nature of the proletarian State. The Code of Labour Laws Paragraph 155 runs: «In accordance with Statute 16 of the Constitution of the R.S.F.S.R, all organs of the State must render to the industrial unions and their organisations every assistance, place at their disposal fullyequipped premises to be used as Palaces of Labour and trade unions halls; charge reduced rates for public services such as posts, telegraphs, telephones, railway and shipping rates, etc». These are the privileges and subsidies afforded us. Is that good or bad? I think it is good. I think that few Western European trade unions would refuse to accept such privileges and subsidies even from bourgeois States.

—Formally our trade unions are independent of the State Power, they are subject to no State organ; and no command of any State organ is imperative for the trade unions, beyond the general laws of the country. Nevertheless, actually, the trade unions are the copartners in State Power, for only in this way, with the support of working class organisations and the whole working class, can the Soviet Government govern in the period of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

In respect of finance, the trade unions in recent years have been entirely independent of the State, and the assistance of the State to the trade unions has been, and is, expressed only within the framework of the Constitution, because the whole nature of the Workers' State is such, that it considers it its duty to give every possible moral and material assistance to the workers' unions, when need arises. This assistance simply amounts to putting at the disposal of the trade unions free accommodation and

reduced rates for public services, as enumerated above. Materially and financially, our unions, being centralised, are now so strong that, despite the shouts of the English and other bourgeoisies, in spite of the calumnies the Western European Press may pour out against us, — our unions are now so strong that, in whatever part of the globe our class enemy-Capital-may seize the workers by the throat, we shall always be the first to offer them material assistance. We have proved this more than once already — and we will prove it again in the future.



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